

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of accounting for services provided in an Internet access transaction

comprising:

using a first server to track an amount of time a first user is connected to the Internet through a first system operated by a first Internet Service Provider with whom the first user does not have an account;

transmitting a user record from the first server to a central settlement server, the user record comprising data that includes an identifier for the first user and the amount of time the first user was connected to the Internet through the first system; and

using the central settlement server to generate a report from the user record, the report including at least the amount of time the first user was connected to the Internet through the first system.

2. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

before generating the report, filtering the data in the user record.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein the step of filtering the data in the user record includes the removal of duplicate records.

4. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

providing the report to the first Internet Service Provider.

5. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

storing the user record on a second server before transmitting the user record to the central settlement server.

Sub.
A2

6. A method of accounting for services provided in an Internet access transaction comprising:

using a first server to track an amount of time a first user is connected to the Internet through a first system operated by a first Internet Service Provider with whom the first user does not have an account;

transmitting a user record from the first server to a second server, the user record including at least an identifier for the first user and the amount of time the first user was connected to the Internet through the first system;

transmitting the user record from the second server to a central settlement server;

storing the user record in a first database controlled by the central settlement server;

filtering the user record to yield a filtered user record;

storing the filtered user record in a second database controlled by the central settlement server;

using the central settlement server to generate a roaming report from the filtered user record, the roaming report including at least an amount of money owed to the first Internet Service Provider for the amount of time the first user was connected to the Internet through the first system; and

using the central settlement server to generate a settlement report from the filtered user report, the settlement report including at least an amount of money a second Internet Service Provider must pay for the amount of time the first user was connected to the Internet through the first system.

7. The method of claim 6 further comprising:

making the roaming report available to the first Internet Service Provider.

8. The method of claim 7 wherein the step of making the roaming report available to the first Internet Service Provider comprises publishing the roaming report on a World Wide Web server accessible by the first Internet Service Provider.

9. The method of claim 6 wherein the roaming report includes an amount of money owed by the first Internet Service Provider to a second Internet Service Provider for an amount of time a second user was connected to the Internet through a second system operated by the second Internet Service Provider with whom the second user does not have an account.

10. The method of claim 6 further comprising:

making the settlement report available to the second Internet Service Provider.

11. The method of claim 10 further comprising:

B3
Cont

after the settlement report is made available to the second Internet Service Provider, transmitting funds from the second Internet Service Provider to a settlement operator; and transmitting funds from the settlement operator to the first Internet Service Provider.

Sub.
G4

12. An apparatus for tracking an Internet access transaction comprising:

first server means for tracking an amount of time a first user is connected to the Internet through a first system operated by a first Internet Service Provider with whom the first user does not have an account and for generating a first user record that includes at least an identifier for the first user and the amount of time the first user was connected to the Internet through the first system;

first transmission means for transmitting the first user record over the Internet;

second server means for receiving the first user record from the first server when the first user record is transmitted over the Internet by the first transmission means, and for retransmitting a second user record over the Internet, the second user record including at least some of the same information contained in the first user record;

third server means for receiving the second user record from the second server means when the second user record is transmitted over the Internet; and

first storage means associated with the third server means for storing the second user record.

13. The apparatus of claim 12 further comprising:

second storage means associated with the third server means; and

filtering means for altering at least some information on the second user record to yield a third user record, and for storing the third user record on the second storage means.

14. The apparatus of claim 12 further comprising:

report generation means for assembling at least some of the information in the second user record with information from a plurality of other user records to yield a report, the other user records including an identifier for each of a plurality of other users and an amount of time each of the plurality of other users were connected to the Internet.

15. The apparatus of claim 13 further comprising:

report generation means for assembling at least some of the information in the third user record with information from a plurality of other user records to yield a report, the other user records including an identifier for each of a plurality of other users and an amount of time each of the plurality of other users were connected to the Internet.

16. The apparatus of claim 15 further comprising:

web server means for publishing the report on a world wide web page.

17. The apparatus of claim 15 further comprising:

file transfer protocol server means for making the report available as an ASCII file on the Internet.

add a 5